

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 TAIPEI 002490

SIPDIS

WASHINGTON PASS AIT/W

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [TW](#)

SUBJECT: NATIONAL ASSEMBLY APPROVES CONSTITUTIONAL REFORMS:  
DPP AND KMT SUPPORT HOLDS FIRM

REF: A. 2004 TAIPEI 2662

[B](#). TAIPEI 2066

[C](#). TAIPEI 2337

[1](#)1. Summary. Taiwan's ad hoc National Assembly (NA) overwhelmingly approved a constitutional revision package June 7 with far-reaching implications for Taiwan's political party system. This completes a process begun in August 2004 to modify the Legislative Yuan (LY) and change the rules for altering the constitution. The revisions over time will likely marginalize small, often one-issue, political parties, encouraging the growth of a two-party political system and a more stable and moderate public policy arena. As passage of the revision package became increasingly assured over the last few days, President Chen began to suggest once again a "second stage" of constitutional revisions, though he has been careful to define these as government efficiency, labor and human rights and not the highly sensitive issues of name change and a new constitution that he proposed in the course of his presidential election campaign. End Summary.

[1](#)2. The ad hoc NA passed by 84 percent vote a far-reaching constitutional revision package on Tuesday, June 7. The ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) and the main opposition Kuomintang party (KMT), which won 83 percent of the vote in the May 14 NA election, succeeded in holding their "troops" in line, with every single DPP and KMT delegate voting in favor of the reform package.

[1](#)3. The NA was "ad hoc" because it had only one task: to ratify a constitutional revision package passed by the Legislative Yuan (LY) last August (Ref A). The revisions will create a one-legislator-per-district legislative system (vice the current complex multiple-legislators-per-district system). It will also halve the number of LY seats from 225 to 113, extend the LY term to four years, and make future legislative elections concurrent with presidential elections. Finally, the reform package permanently abolishes the NA, leaving Taiwan with a unicameral legislature. Any future constitutional amendments must now be proposed by three-fourths of the LY and approved by island-wide referendum, raising the threshold for constitutional amendments. A majority of all eligible voters must ratify the proposed amendment in a referendum.

An Angry Minority

-----

[1](#)4. The NA opened on May 30 with considerable discord. A group of Democratic Action Alliance delegates publicly shredded their NA delegate credentials, and resigned in protest over the reform package, particularly the halving of LY seats. All the while, the Taiwan Solidarity Union (TSU) delegation of 21 chanted the slogan &oppose voting for the package, rewrite the Constitution, rectify the national title, save Taiwan.8

[1](#)5. In a day-long session on June 6 in which political parties stated their positions, TSU and PFP lambasted the constitutional revision package, though for very different reasons. TSU delegates charged that considering the constitutional amendments as a package without debating the individual provisions goes against all democratic principles. They also lamented that the referendum provision will make it more difficult to amend the constitution. PFP delegates, on the other hand, warned that the referendum provision will pave the way for the ruling DPP to push for constitutional changes and for name change. They castigated DPP and KMT for working together to "ruin the constitution." Having won just 13 per cent of the popular vote on May 14, however, the two parties were in no position to block ratification of the package.

To the Mountain: Imposing Discipline, Leading "Troops"

-----

[1](#)6. In response to reports that some of their delegates planned to jump ship and vote against the package, DPP and KMT rushed to fill the breach, imposing strict party discipline on their delegates and dispatching party leaders to Sun Yatsen Hall on top of Yangming Mountain to "lead the troops." President Chen Shui-bian personally met with the

127 DPP delegates on May 29 to press for their unanimous support for the DPP campaign platform in support of the constitutional reforms. DPP Chairman Su Tseng-chang announced that he and Presidential Office Secretary General Yu Shyi-kun would "accompany" the party delegation throughout the sitting to ensure all members toed the party line. KMT Chair Lien Chan announced he would go up the mountain at 1:00 p.m., an hour before the scheduled vote, to "assume command" (duzhen) of KMT "troops." The party assigned one central party official to oversee every seven or eight deputies and to quickly replace anyone who absented or defied the party line during balloting.

17. Both parties announced harsh measures to ensure party discipline, including the quick replacement of any of their delegates who voted against the party's campaign pledge of support for the reforms. Finally, the two parties utilized their three-fourths majority to establish a two-round voting system and ensure that NA rules required all delegates to write their names on their ballots. When the Central Election Commission (CEC) announced that it could approve replacement NA delegates in "just 15 minutes" and set up a desk just outside the assembly hall to quickly process papers for replacement deputies, passage of the revision package became a fait accompli.

#### The Writing on the Wall

18. Recognizing the inevitable, some members of the TSU and PFP began to speak publicly of the possibility of greater cooperation, even merger (hebing), with their respective coalition partners, DPP and KMT. On May 29, the day before the NA session began, several TSU and PFP legislators made public comments to this effect, eliciting harsh condemnation from TSU and PFP hardliners on the evening political talk shows.

#### Constitutional Reform "Second Stage"

19. In the final days before the vote, as passage of the constitutional revision package became assured, President Chen began to speak for the first time in nearly six months of further -- what he termed a "second stage" -- constitutional revisions. He and other DPP leaders, however, have been careful to frame this second stage as consisting of improvements in government efficiency, labor and human rights. They have publicly assured that it will not involve either of the sensitive issues Chen raised during his election -- name change and a new Taiwan constitution. In the long run, the real impediment to such changes is the twin thresholds any constitutional amendment must cross -- support by three-quarters of the LY and then by half of all eligible voters.

PAAL